

2004 undergraduate survey tackles stereotype of Berkeley as rich in research but poor in teaching

By [Bonnie Azab Powell](#), NewsCenter | 13 December 2004

BERKELEY – Everybody knows that UC Berkeley is a top-ranked research university. (If you haven't heard, a London newspaper recently decided [we're No. 2 in the world](#).) And everybody also knows that for Berkeley undergraduates, that means a miserably impersonal education with large lecture classes conducted by teaching assistants, since professors are locked in their labs – right? Well, no...at least not according to the actual students.

In fact, 84.3 percent of Cal students in a massive annual survey declared themselves "somewhat" to "very" satisfied with their overall academic experience at Berkeley. On question after question about the details of their education, the positive responses outweighed the negative.

Of the 9,595 undergraduates who responded to the 2004 University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES), 53.5 percent had taken classes in the past year (either "occasionally," "often" or "very often") with a professor who knew the respondent's name. Only 16.2 percent of respondents had never been called on by name; 30.2 percent had rarely had that experience. Nor were those professors invisible outside of class: more than half of respondents — 54.6 percent — said they had met with faculty members in person (such as during office hours), either occasionally, often, or very often in the past year, while 15.2 percent had never done so and 30.1 percent had done so rarely.

The image of the chilly research factory is just one of the under-examined stereotypes about UC Berkeley that this large, detailed survey puts to rest annually. In an article earlier this year, called "[Bye-bye, Berzerkeley: Surveys provide a peek at the real UC Berkeley students](#)," we wrote about how the 2003 UCUES dispatched many long-held social stereotypes, such as that all Berkeley students were activist liberals who studied all the time, and confirmed at least one: this campus does indeed embrace cultural and religious diversity.

The 2004 UCUES doesn't show any significant changes on these points, but since this year's survey added a number of new questions, there are new insights to be found. A somewhat surprising example, given Berkeley's reputation for civic engagement: large numbers of UCUES respondents said they were "not that well-informed" when it came to campus issues and politics (53.1 percent), California state issues and politics (48.1 percent), or international issues and politics (43.3 percent). Only on the topic of national issues and politics did a sizable percentage (41.2 percent) consider themselves "well-informed"; another 37.6 percent admitted to being rather clueless on national matters as well as local.

That may or may not be related to where UC Berkeley students find their news. Most respondents said they get their information primarily from the Internet (including online newspapers). Over a third, 37.7 percent, turn to the Web every day and another 27.8 percent several times a week for news, versus the 7.8 percent who watch televised national news daily and the 17.4 percent who do so several times a week. The most popular online news sites are CNN, The New York Times, Yahoo, and MSN/MSNBC (see box, right). The Daily Cal apparently trumps the San Francisco Chronicle and other national newspapers in popularity: 48.4 percent of respondents said they read the

"campus newspaper" every day or several times a week, compared with 26 percent for "other print newspaper."

Poli Shy majors

UC Berkeley undergraduates seemed to have moved slightly to the left politically in the year since the last UCUES survey. Of the 7,967 students who answered the political beliefs question, those who identified themselves as "liberal" accounted for 46.5 percent of respondents, compared with 42.2 percent last year. The "far left" contingent also saw a slight bump, from 6.1 percent to 7.9 percent. Those with "middle of the road" political beliefs went from 39.4 percent to 34.5 percent, while the portion identifying themselves as "conservative" and "far right" went from 11.8 percent and 0.5 percent to 10.5 percent and 0.6 percent, respectively.

The Office of Student Research was able to analyze these results further, tracking individual (but anonymous) respondents, and confirmed that this slight shift to the left appears to be consistent across all class levels. For those 3,374 Berkeley students who answered the political identification item both this year and last year, 69.9 percent had not changed their political stance, while 11.5 percent had inched right and 18.6 percent had moved left. But nearly all (95.1 percent) of those shifting their views had only moved one step over, for example, from "middle-of-the road" to "liberal."

Despite this being an election year, students' political beliefs once again did not exactly translate into action. Although 16.9 percent characterized their political views as "very strong" and another 48.9 percent called theirs "strong," the overwhelming majority of respondents had not participated in a single political meeting or rally (62.8 percent), protest or demonstration (73.4 percent), or political campaign (81 percent) in the past year. Fewer than 5 percent of respondents had participated in any of these political activities "often or very often." One should take this with an enormous grain of salt, however; responses to the UCUES questionnaire were collected from March to August of this heated political year, so we'll never know how many students went on voter registration drives after giving their answers.

Still, at the time the survey was conducted, 73.6 percent were registered to vote, while 11.9 percent said they were not registered because they weren't citizens. As we discussed last year, many Berkeley undergraduates are first-generation Americans or permanent residents: only 35 percent of respondents said that both their parents had been born in the United States, while 54.2 percent said that neither parent had been.

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Want 2 talk f2f?

The 2004 UCUES also contains a wealth of information about students' social habits and attitudes. For example, watching television no longer seems to be a favorite time-waster among students: 24.3 percent, the largest group of respondents, said they spent no hours at all in front of the tube. The most popular recreational activity cited was "other socializing," such as talking with friends (versus "partying," "going to movies," or "attending sporting events"): 23.6 percent spent three to four hours per week chatting away, and 20.6 percent spent five to six hours.

The next most popular non-academic activities were physical exercise and e-mail/online chat, closely followed by playing video games/surfing the Web. And 4,650 students,

about half of all respondents, said they participated in clubs aside from fraternities or sororities and student government.

Students hoped to get a lot more out of their college experience than just a bachelor's degree. The goals selected as most "essential" by respondents were obtaining "the knowledge and skills I need to pursue my chosen career" (37.1 percent), followed by discovering "the kind of person I really want to be" (32.4 percent). And while 30.2 percent said that establishing "meaningful personal relationships in college" was essential, only 3.8 percent felt that strongly about forming romantic relationships.

Post-graduation, most students wanted to "make a lot of money" — a combined 68.1 percent percent rated it from "somewhat important" to "very important" — but only 10.9 percent gave it the highest rating of essential. Compare that with how important it was for these students to "be in a position to give back to community after finishing education": 20.5 percent said such future altruism was "essential," plus another 70.3 percent who rated it from "somewhat important" to "very important."

Can't get mo' satisfaction

While there's no doubt that Berkeley still has work to do in the areas of making sure undergraduates have ample access to small seminars and research opportunities, the UCUES responses indicate that the university has managed to satisfy more students on these counts than it has failed.

In addition to having had classes where the professor knows the students by name, which can go a long way toward making this huge university feel like a more manageable place, 59.1 percent of respondents declared themselves "somewhat satisfied," "satisfied," or "very satisfied" with their access to small classes. On the research front, 83.9 percent had had at least one lecture course in the past academic year with a faculty member who referred to his or her own research as part of the class. More than a quarter of the undergrads, 28 percent, had taken at least one small, research-oriented seminar from a faculty member, and 28.5 percent had worked on at least one research project under the direction of a faculty member.

Of the undergraduate respondents who had declared a major, 76.3 percent were somewhat to very satisfied with the advising they had experienced from faculty members, and 77.5 percent were not displeased with the accessibility of faculty outside class. Even greater numbers declared themselves happy with the quality of their faculty instruction and of teaching by TA's: 85.8 percent and 82.3 percent, respectively. That's not because instructors give out easy A's, either: a sizable portion of students — 44.7 percent — claimed that they had worked harder than they ever thought they could "to meet an instructor's standards or expectations" either occasionally, often, or very often. And despite the battles over increasing student fees, 81.2 percent of respondents said they were somewhat to very satisfied with the value of their education given its cost.

The strongest endorsement of all comes from the responses to the UCUES statement "Knowing what I do now, I would still choose to enroll at UC Berkeley." An amazing 86.8 percent would make that same choice again; with 40.8 percent saying they "strongly agreed" with the sentiment.

http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/2004/12/14_survey.shtml